

ESSAY ON NOVELS:

A POETICAL EPISTLE.

ADDRESSED TO AN ANCIENT

AND

TO A MODERN^x BISHOP. **Hurd*

WITH SIX SONNETS, FROM WERTER.

K
By ALEXANDER THOMSON, Esq.

AUTHOR OF WHIST, A POEM.

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MERCIER.

EDINBURGH:

Printed for P. HILL and J. WATSON and Co.

1793.

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TO THE HONORABLE BISHOP
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BY ALEXANDER JOHNSON, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "HART'S POEM"



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P R E F A C E.

IT must afford every liberal and manly spirit ample cause of self-congratulation, that he lives at a period so favourable as the present, for the rapid progress of philosophical inquiry; at a period which has already witnessed the dispersion of so many clouds of prejudice and error, and which, in all human probability, will witness the dispersion of so many more. Under the influence of such a feeling, the most pious of mankind might be tempted to regret, that it had not been consistent with the Providence of God, to suffer him to sleep in the silence of non-entity, till another century had brought nearer its accomplishment, the glorious work of mental reformation, and allowed him to contemplate the intellectual horizon, more widely illuminated by the sun of reason.

Of the influence of religious and political prejudices, however inimical to happiness and virtue, it is not at present our intention to speak. But there are other prejudices of a literary kind, which, though less hurtful to the welfare of society, will be found to be equally replete with absurdity, and equally repugnant to justice and to reason.

One of the most fatal of these prejudices, as having a direct and undeniable tendency to preclude every effort of original genius, and turn us into a herd of servile imitators, is that extravagant veneration for the writers of antiquity, which holds them up to us as models of infallible perfection; and denounces against every one who shall have the audacity to question their right to such implicit submission, or who shall venture to lose sight of their footsteps for a moment, the sentence of critical excommunication.

It must indeed be admitted, that this prejudice is now much less prevalent than it was, and that it seems daily to be losing ground; and yet even now there are persons to be met with, so wholly engrossed by the study of the classics, that they have no leisure to look into the works of their countrymen; those works, which, in spite of all their imperfections, must be infinitely

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more interesting to a British reader, than the finest production of ancient genius; and, without offence to the profoundest scholar, we may add, infinitely more intelligible also; those works which present us with a richer variety, and an ampler fund both of instruction and entertainment than can possibly be derived by their most enthusiastic admirers from the mutilated fragments of Greece and Rome.

What sentiments of indignation must be felt by every person of genuine taste, when he is told that MILTON has no other merit than that of being a successful imitator of HOMER; when he meets with a pedant, who, though intimately acquainted with every one of the Greek tragedies, had never the curiosity to read a drama of SHAKESPEARE; who talks most familiarly of ARISTOPHANES and PLAUTUS; but would smile with contempt and pity for your ignorance, if you ventured to mention the SCHOOL for SCANDAL; who expatiates with rapture upon the various beauties to be found in the Odes of PINDAR and of HORACE, but is astonished when he hears of the Lyric Pieces of COLLINS; and stares when you tell him of the BARD of GRAY; who will repeat to you readily, whenever you desire him, more than half of the amorous epistles of OVID, but never condescended to charge his memory with a single couplet of ELOISA to ABELARD.

Were opinions like these confined entirely to pedants their tendency could not be very dangerous, either from the influence of precept or example. But, when we find persons, who, upon other occasions have given ample proofs of the elegance of their taste, censuring every composition as defective, that is not formed upon the models of antiquity; when we hear such an eminent writer as HURD, proscribing (in conformity to these principles), every kind of fictitious history not decorated with the trappings of poetical numbers, without condescending to make any exception in favour of the labours of RICHARDSON and FIELDING*, it were difficult to determine whether such a sentence tends more to move our indignation or our pity.

* See his "Essay on the Idea of Universal Poetry." The passage here alluded to is quoted at full in the note upon verse 6th of the poem.

How

P R E F A C E.

How different from this is the judgment past upon the former of these writers, by the author of the RAMBLER *, whose stile of criticism (whenever it is not warped by any personal prejudice), will be found to be equally rational and manly †. And the author of the "Essay on the Genius of "Pope," (perhaps the most elegant and amusing piece of criticism that any age or nation has produced ‡), enumerates both CLARISSA and TOM JONES, among the works which do honour to British genius, by the profound and accurate knowledge they display of the various workings of the human heart; and declares boldly, that it would be the height of pedantry to prefer the madness of ORESTES in EURIPIDES, or even to compare it to that of CLEMENTINA ||.

* See the RAMBLER, No. 97th, and the passage itself quoted, in the note upon verse 121st of the poem.

† So long as a poet confines himself entirely within the circle of real life, so long is Dr. JOHNSON the best of critics; and his decisions equally acute and judicious. Nothing can be juster and more solid than the judgment he passes upon the LYCIDAS of MILTON, and his condemnation of the Elegies of HAMMOND. But whenever the poet is carried by enthusiasm

"Beyond this visible diurnal sphere."

and soars into the regions of pure poetry, the Doctor, whose fancy, it must be acknowledged, was none of the most vigorous faculties of his mind, ceases immediately to be a competent judge, and is incapable of forming a proper estimate of his merit. Hence the coolness with which he talks of SPENSER, of the COMUS of MILTON, and the FABLES of DRYDEN: And hence the faint and niggard commendation which he condescends to bestow upon AKENSIDE and COLLINS, and the sentence, disgraceful only to himself, which he ventures to pass upon the Bard of GRAY.

‡ If such be the character of this work, what shall be said of a late writer, author of ^{# Lord Gardenstone} "Miscellanies in Prose and Verse," published at EDINBURGH in 1791, who, when mentioning the universality of its reception, talks of the "difficulty which a man of sense finds in "kicking it out of his way." The sense of that man is surely little to be envied, who could peruse WARTON's Criticism on the Epistle of ELOISA, and his concluding estimate of the genius of POPE, without the highest admiration and delight. He who cannot relish such a critical banquet, may be a journalist of travels, or a translator of BUCHANAN, but he will never be a judge of elegant literature.

|| For the first of these passages, see Sect. X. of the ESSAY, Vol. II. For the second,

^{# Lord Gardenstone} Sect. V, Vol. I. who published "Travelling Memorandums made in a Tour on the Continent."
* James Thomson Callander, the Editor of Lord Gardenstone's ^{En-} "Miscellanies in Prose and Verse" at the end of which there is an Address from the Editor to the public proposing a Translation of Buchanan's Poems.

Encouraged by the sanction of such examples, I make no scruple of giving it as my opinion, that RICHARDSON, in point of originality, and power of wielding the passions at his pleasure, is inferior only to the immortal SHAKESPEAR; and that the HISTORY OF CLARISSA HARLOWE, if we consider the extent and variety of its fable, is the greatest effort of human genius that any age or nation has produced. I know that this very extent and variety will be urged by many as an objection against it, and that tediousness is one of the faults of which RICHARDSON is very often accused, and from which his admirers cannot always defend him. Nor can it be denied, that the two first volumes, even of CLARISSA, are rather tiresome, as they consist of a series of cruel persecutions, with circumstances very little diversified, and the last of which is as fruitless as the first *. Had RICHARDSON written for the present generation, when the claim of a father to an absolute controul over his daughter's affections (like many other despotic claims) is very generally and justly exploded, it is probable that he would not have thought it necessary to lead his heroine through two volumes before he suffered her to escape from persecution. But whatever may be thought of these preliminary volumes, the moment she abandons her father's house the slightest circumstance becomes highly interesting; and I am persuaded there is not a single syllable through the whole course of the remaining volumes which a judicious reader could possibly wish away.

No one, I believe, who is in the least acquainted with the character of the author of the following verses, will accuse him of wishing to undervalue Poetry, by the preference here given to a novel which is generally supposed to be in plain prose. But he should be sorry if he were capable of making such a narrow definition of Poetry as would exclude the HISTORY OF CLARISSA HARLOWE. Every work, which addresses either the fancy or the heart, and is composed in elegant and animated language, he has always held to be Poetry; and though he admits that the harmony of poetical numbers is often a very pleasing accompaniment to the more intrinsic beauties of the art, he holds that it is never a necessary adjunct, and that on many occasions it would be

* I was about to advise every reader of CLARISSA to pass over these two volumes, when I recollected the charming story of the Rosebud, which, with several other beautiful passages, is at least worthy of a single perusal

be a very improper one. He would be far, however, from advising any one to attempt poetry without verses, unless he felt himself conscious of possessing the talents of a RICHARDSON, a GOETHE, or a SCHILLER.

With regard to another important particular, (indeed by far the most important of all) the moral tendency of the modern novel compared with that of heroic poetry, it is a point which, I think, admits of little dispute. The epic poet introduces to our acquaintance only such personages as kings and heroes, beings of whom there are not many in the world, and whose number, it is probable, will be always decreasing; beings, from the fortunes and feelings of whom little practical improvement can be gathered. The novelist, on the other hand, chooses most of his characters from the private circle of domestic life; that circle which is the fairest theatre both of human happiness and virtue; and hence the examples which these characters exhibit cannot fail to be of general utility, as they come home to the business and the bosoms of all. Were I, indeed, to speak from my own experience, I should be inclined to carry the matter still farther, and assert, that the effect of a well-written novel must be far greater in a moral point of view than that of the finest and purest of our tragedies, with all the assistance of representation. I have felt myself much more deeply affected, and the flame of virtue more kindled in my breast, by a couple of pages written by RICHARDSON, or even by a novelist very much his inferior, perused in the silence of solitude and retirement, than I ever did at the most favourable season by all the efforts of stage representation, where the attention is distracted by the surrounding objects; and one character indifferently supported ruins unavoidably the effect of the whole.

I trust, however, that nothing I have said can be construed into any intention of recommending the reading of every novel without discrimination. I know that far the greater number of the productions which go under that name, and which load the shelves of our circulating libraries, are unworthy the perusal of any person of sense; but I know also that it is the height of absurdity to proscribe the innocent along with the guilty; and that, upon the same principle, and with equal justice, a person disgusted with the miserable stuff which appears under the name of Poetry, in most of our present magazines and newspapers, might censure every one who condescended to read the works of a MASON, a COWPER, or a DARWIN.

ESSAY

ESSAY ON NOVELS;

A POETICAL EPISTLE.

ADDRESSED TO AN ANCIENT AND TO A MODERN BISHOP.

PEACE to thy bones, wherever they repose,
And softly may they sleep, sweet HELIODORE;
Thou best of Bishops; many a precious hour
Of wholesome laughter and delicious woe
Has thy romantic toil procur'd to me!
Not that I ever read, or ever may,
Thy ÆTHIOPIAN Tale: I praise thee not
For what thyself perform'd, (tho' haply that
No flight deserves) but what thou wert the cause.

B

Of

Verse 7.] It is generally supposed that the **ETHIOPICS**, or the **LOVES of THEAGENES** and **CHARICLEA**, written by **HELIODORUS**, bishop of **TRICCA**, is the earliest specimen of prosaic fiction, and of consequence the undoubted progenitor of all our modern novels and romances.

Of others doing, for those wondrous fruits, 10
 Which, taught by thy example, souls produc'd
 Of ampler reach and bolder nerve than thine.
 Does not each hero, whose eventful deeds
 Have since adorn'd Romance's brilliant page,
 To thy THEAGENES his being owe? 15
 RANDOM and SANTILEANE, who both pursu'd
 The chace of Fortune thro' such winding ways :
 Audacious PICKLE, wild, mischievous boy !
 The gentle HARLEY ; and the fiery, proud,
 Unequall'd WERTER ; GRANDISON, in whom 20
 Each thought was virtue and each action praise ;
 With JONES himself, the prince of honest hearts,
 Are all his sons. Thy CHARICLEA, too,
 Can show her num'rous band of daughters fair ;
 For her's is MARIANA ; her's the poor, 25
 Ill-starr'd ROUBIGNE ; her's the lovely maid
 Of MOWBRAY Castle ; EVELINA, sweet,
 Bewitching novice ; DELVILLE's beauteous ward ;

And

Verse 14.] Both here, and in other places of the poem, the word ROMANCE is used only as a substitute for the less poetical term NOVEL, and has no reference to those extravagant fictions which were the objects of the exquisite satire of CERVANTES ; nor to those still more absurd and fantastical, which have been so successfully turned into ridicule by the ingenious authorels of the FEMALE QUIXOTE.

And charming CELESTINE; the wondrous wives
 Of BOOTH and WOLMAR; and, beyond them all, 30
 Divine CLARISSA, virtue's matchless queen.

How great, oh HELIODORE! from this account,
 Appears our debt to thee! To thee we owe
 LE SAGE's satire keen; the pungent force
 Of SMOLLET's ridicule; each thought refin'd 35
 Of lively MARIVAUX; each picture true
 Of polish'd manners and of polish'd life,
 Which BURNEY's pencil paints; those magic webs
 Of pleasing fiction, which ingenious SMITH
 So richly weaves; MACKENZIE's tender skill; 40
 Unrivall'd GOETHE's strong, pathetic pow'rs;

B 2.

The

Verse 29.] The elegant authoress of EMMELINE and CELESTINA must pardon me for not making mention of ETHELINDE, as I cannot but think she is entirely unworthy of being found in the company of her sisters. But had I been acquainted with her brother DESMOND, before writing this poem, his merit would have undoubtedly procured him a place in the foregoing list of Romantic Heroes.

Verse 36.] "Now, as the paradisaical pleasures of the MAHOMETANS consist in playing upon the flute and lying with Houris, be mine to read eternal new romances of MARIVAUX and CREBILLON."

Gray to West, from Mason's Memoirs. Vol. III. p. 27.

Verse 41.] Nothing has ever astonished me more than the frequency with which I have heard it asserted, that WERTER is not a GERMAN production, but merely a fabrication.

The nervous eloquence of wild ROUSSEAU;
 The scenes of FIELDING, humour's lord supreme;
 And moral RICHARDSON's enchanting page.

But what was thy reward? Did not the fierce 45
 And fiery bigots of those barb'rous days,
 For writing that, which, merely to translate
 In better times, a bishopric obtain'd,
 Expel thee out of thine? Unjust decree!
 And yet ev'n now, in this enlighten'd age, 50
 Bishops there are, and BRITISH bishops too,
 That would have join'd to push thee from thy place,
 Tho' not from bigot, but from critic zeal;
 Who deem it heresy against the creed
 Of genuine taste, to write a good romance, 55
 Or

tion by the translator of OSSIAN. To prevent any of my ignorant countrymen from making such a ridiculous assertion in future, it will surely be sufficient here to assure them, that the concurring testimony of all the writers of GERMANY ascribes this wonderful performance to GOETHE. One of their fables, which I have read upon the subject of the yellow-hammer aping the nightingale, has no other moral but this interrogation "Nachahmer WERTHERS, seyd ihr GOETHE?"—"Imitator of WERTHER, are you a
 "GOETHE?"

Verse 49.] It is a singular circumstance that HELIODORUS should have lost his bishopric for writing a romance, the translation of which procured AMYOT the gift of a bishopric from FRANCIS I.

Or praise one written well. Nor will I now,
 From fear or false respect for him to whom
 These words belong, decline to champion here
 This righteous cause, and summon to the field
 My formidable foe. Hail, sapient HURD!

60

Illustrious prelate, hail! to thee I call,
 But with no hostile voice; none more than I
 Admires, on other points, thy critic skill,
 And the chaste graces of thy ATTIC page:
 So much the rather must I now regret
 The rash decision, which thy lips severe

65

Against

Verse 66] What are we to think of those Novels or Romances, as they are called, that is, fables constructed on some private and familiar subject, which have been so current of late through all Europe. As they propose pleasure for their end, and prosecute it besides in the way of fiction, though without metrical numbers, and generally indeed in harsh and rugged prose, one easily sees what their pretensions are, and under what idea they are ambitious to be received; yet, as they are wholly destitute of measured sounds (to say nothing of their other numberless defects), they can at most be considered but as hasty, imperfect, and abortive poems; whether spawned from the dramatic or narrative species, it may be hard to say. However, such as they are, these novel-ties have been generally well received; some for the real merit of their execution; others, for their amusing subjects; all of them for the gratification they afford, or promise at least to a vitiated, palled, and sickly imagination, that last disease of learned minds, and sure prognostic of expiring letters. But whatever may be the temporary success of these things, (for they vanish as fast as they are produced, and are produced as soon as they are conceived) good sense will acknowledge no work of art, but such as

66

Against Romances past, involving all,
 Whate'er their merit, in one common doom,
 As wild, irregular, abortive births.
 The spurious offspring of heroic song, 70
 Which classic genius never could compose,
 Nor classic taste approve. So much the more
 Would I endeavour, (if I fairly might)
 By friendly argument, to turn thy mind,
 And move thee to reverse the stern decree. 75

Ask thy own heart ; for to that honest judge
 Still lies, on points like these, the last appeal.
 What epic song, though glitt'ring with the pomp
 Of heav'nly vision, strengthen'd by the force
 And magic splendour of poetic phrase, 80
 Conjoin'd with all the fascinating pow'r
 Of tuneful sound, was ever yet perus'd
 With half that eagerness, which ev'n the worst,
 (What then the best ?) of these domestic tales,

is composed according to the laws of its kind. We may indeed mix and confound them
 if we will, (for there is a sort of literary luxury, which would engross all pleasures at
 once, even such as are contradictory to each other) or in our rage for incessant gratifi-
 cation, we may take up with half-formed pleasures, such as come first to hand, and
 may be administered by any body. But true taste requires chaste, severe, and simple
 pleasures ; and true genius will only be concerned in administering such.

HURD *on the Idea of Universal Poetry.*

Scarce

Scarcely ever fails to raise? But let us call 85
 More special proof. Does VIRGIL's pious prince,
 When by the will divine, constrain'd to quit
 His fair PHOENICIAN queen, inspire the soul
 With such emotion, as when GRANDISON,
 (Tho' fore the conflict) at religion's call, 90
 Relinquish BOLOGNA's maid? Can all the craft
 Of fly ULYSSES, or the craftier wiles
 Of MILTON's subtle fiend, so much amuse:

Verse 85.] I will not indeed presume to say with Voltaire, that among the greatest admirers of antiquity, there is scarce one to be found who could ever read the Iliad with that eagerness and rapture which a woman feels when she peruses the novel of Zayde.

ADVENTURER, No. 80.

But I will say, without reference to any authority, that none of the greatest admirers of antiquity ever read the ILIAD with that eagerness and rapture which every person of common sensibility must feel in the perusal of the novel of CLARISSA.

Verse 93.] The part of ULYSSES in HOMER's Odyssey is very much admired by ARISTOTLE, as perplexing that fable with very agreeable plots and intricacies, not only by the many adventures in his voyage, and the subtilty of his behaviour, but by the various concealments and discoveries of his person in several parts of that poem. But the crafty being I have now mentioned makes a much longer voyage than ULYSSES, puts in practice many more wiles and stratagems, and hides himself under a greater variety of shapes and appearances, all of which are severally detected, to the great delight and surprize of the reader.

SPECTATOR, No. 273.

The

The curious mind, as that exhaustless store
 Of treach'rous arts by LOVELACE us'd, to gain 95
 His cruel purpose? Or the fate of TROY,
 (Tho' hosts of heroes, fight on either side,
 And all OLYMPUS in the cause contend),
 Awake those energies of hope and fear,
 Which still attend on each important step, 100
 That hastens or retards CLARISSA's fall?
 Say, does the mind of true unbiass'd taste,
 Free from the trammels of scholastic rule,
 With half that pleasure MILTON's page peruse;
 That labour'd page, where all the pomp of words, 105
 And each ungraceful and pedantic aid
 Of foreign hues, and mythologic lore,
 Effays to paint the charm of EDEN's bowers;
 As when that simple page attracts the view,
 In which GENEVA's animated son 110
 His JULIA's garden paints, and fills each line
 With native beauty, and unborrow'd grace?
 Or say, by bigot prejudice unsway'd,
 Did ever genuine feeling's eye survey.

Verse 111.] MASON, from whose judgment in matters of taste, the author of the
 "Essay on the Marks of Imitation," will not surely have any inclination to appeal,
 speaks of this description of ROUSSEAU, with that warmth of commendation it deserves,
 in one of the notes to his ENGLISH GARDEN.

The

That rich effusion of pathetic song,
 By far the fairest of the MANTUAN muse.
 Where hapless Dido's melancholy care,
 Prepares the pomp of voluntary death,
 With half that luxury of pleasing woe,
 As when his art, who ev'ry passion sway'd,
 And made them move at virtue's fair command,
 Presents CLARISSA to the weeping view,
 Triumphant rising from her shameful wrongs,
 Above relentless kindred's rude neglect,
 And all the treachery of savage man;
 With firm unshaken soul preparing all
 The mournful requisites of fun'ral pomp,
 And fondly placing in her dauntless view
 The sable cover'd chest, so soon to prove
 The last sad mansion of her lovely frame?
 Nor need we thus forbear, or fear to ask
 The fondest votary of ancient art,
 If, when his admiration first perus'd
 The tender interview of parting love
 Betwixt brave HECTOR and his weeping spouse,

C

(That

Verse 121.] "The reader is indebted for this day's entertainment to an author,
 "from whom the age has received greater favours, who has enlarged the knowledge
 "of human nature, and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue."

(That brightest effort of HOMERIC pow'rs)
 His breast, with half that thrill of rapture glow'd,
 Or half that ecstasy, of mournful joy,
 As when he read, in its primeval form,
 That matchless scene which ev'ry praise exceeds, 140
 In which, attended by her future Lord,
 Fair LOTTA, her enamour'd WERTER, meets
 Beneath the softness of the lunar ray :
 When, to his raptur'd view, she full displays
 The richest blossoms of her soul sublime, 145
 And shows, at once, with malice undefin'd,

How

Verse 139.] As the common translation of the *SORROWS OF WERTER* exhibits but a faint copy of the original, I have attempted to do somewhat of more justice to the beauties of the interview here alluded to, by versifying the greatest part of the letter in which it is contained, (being the last of the first volume); which the reader will find at the end of the poem.

Verse 142.] LOTTA is the GERMAN contraction for CHARLOTTE: a name, which the power of long habit has rendered so familiar to the ear of the author, that he could not reconcile his mind to the idea of mentioning, in any of his own verses, the mistress of WERTER by any other name. It will, however, be easy for the ENGLISH reader, to whom it may perhaps sound but uncouthly, to change it to the familiar appellation of CHARLOTTE.

Verse 145.] DIESE HIMMLISCHE BLÜTHE DES GEISTES, is the original expression.

How vast the treasure which he now possesst,
 But which to-morrow had resolv'd to leave?
 Or can the poor ANDROMACHE's complaint
 Of her domestic woes; that artless tale, 150
 Which HECTOR must have heard so oft before,
 Compare with that, where LOTTA's angel tongue,
 In feeling's richest flow, recounts at large
 Her mother's virtues; and with fondness dwells
 On each dear instance of maternal love, 155
 Which mark'd her life, or clos'd her parting scene?
 Were I by cruel fate depriv'd of all
 The bright effusions of enchanting art,
 Which, from the birth of time, the sons of taste
 Have pour'd successive forth in ev'ry land; 160
 And were I then allow'd alone to chuse
 What dearest fragment I would still retain,
 Then would I WERTER's charming volume seize,
 And from the rest with eager fondness tear

C 2

Those

Verse 163.] From this unqualified commendation of WERTER, I hope none of my readers will suspect that I am an advocate for those principles which the work is in general supposed to inculcate. I speak of it here only as a critic; and praise it merely because I esteem it: perhaps the most interesting and pathetic performance that ever was written in any language. And even were I to view it with the eye of a moralist, I should be far from thinking it of that dangerous tendency which many people have affected

Those precious pages nine ; which feeling's eye 165
 Unnumber'd times already has review'd :
 And where, with boldness, each succeeding day
 Unwearied rapture still would hope to find.

BUT let us now, good WOR'STER, for the sake
 Of greater brevity and greater ease, 170
 Descend from declamation's height sublime,
 And end our battle in the vale of rhyme.

THO' fond of GREEK, did e'er OXONIAN gay,
 To race with HOMER from NEWMARKET stay ?
 Tho' loud in VIRGIL's praise, what young divine, 175
 To hunt with DIDO, would the chase resign ?
 Tho' blest with taste, did e'er a powder'd beau,
 To walk in EDEN's bow'rs VAUXHALL forego ?

To all these queries (come it e'er so slow)
 I trust your answer must at last be—No ! 180
 Now comes the contrast—Did you never hear ?
 In FRANCE it happen'd—I forget the year ;

And
 seduced to suppose. The arguments for suicide are weak and frivolous, and surely never
 could do any mischief unless to very unprincipled minds ; to whom it is not of much
 consequence whether the books they read are immoral or otherwise, as the depravity
 of their own hearts is sufficient to convert the wholesomest nourishment into poison.

And Lady's name—but she was young and fair :
 And while her Abigail did up her hair,
 Chanc'd to take up in quite a careless way, 185
 As LADY A—— would the last new play,
 The very book we nam'd not long ago,
 (Or meant at least) the JULIA of ROUSSEAU,
 The wond'ring maid had clos'd her tedious toil,
 Nor heard one sentence utter'd all the while : 190
 Ev'n then, which more than doubled her surprise,
 Her studious mistress still forgot to rise :
 Root-bound she seem'd, and fasten'd to her chair,
 As if some magic pow'r had fix'd her there ;
 Till Abigail at last the silence broke, 195
 And thus in humble tone obsequious spoke :
 “ Will not your Ladyship put down your book,
 “ And deign one moment in the glass to look ;
 “ If I have done your curls in proper stile ?
 “ You have not read so long this monstrous while : 200
 “ Besides, the carriage, Ma'am, attends your call,
 “ Which you preferr'd to drive you to the ball.”
 “ What ball, LISETTE ?” her Ladyship replies ;
 But scarcely from the volume lifts her eyes,
 “ What ball ! dear Ma'am ; you stun your servant quite ; 205
 “ The ball you were engag'd to grace to-night.”

“ Then

" Then get you gone—and fend the coach away ;
 " My mind is chang'd—I mean at home to stay."
 In speechless wonder lost, **LISETTE** withdrew :
 While to the page her mistress turn'd anew ;
 Nor made one pause—nor thought on food or rest,
 Till the last sigh escap'd from **JULIA**'s breast.
 Such was the charm she found in tracing there
 The fates and feelings of that wondrous pair ;
 Whose souls, wherever bent, to right or wrong,
 Had nought in common with the vulgar throng ;
 That she this mental feast prefer'd to all
 The livelier pleasures of the midnight ball ;
 To all those joys so much esteem'd by **FRANCE**,
 To sprightly music, and the sprightly dance ;
 To all that wakes the senses to delight,
 From lamps, and dresses gay, and diamonds bright ;
 To those soft sounds which flatt'ry's courtly tongue
 Bestows so lavish on the fair and young ;
 And that less loud, tho' not less pleasing praise,
 Of speechless admiration's ardent gaze ;
 To those proud hopes which scenes like these inspire ;
 To conquest's love, that female first desire,
 And all (to be concise) that women most admire.

Thus, gentle **HURD**, concludes my long oration ;
 Go now in peace, and make the application ;

And

And when this wondrous fact you duly scan,
Still term such works imperfect—if you can.

232

Verse 232.] The fact is related by ROUSSEAU himself, who was not a person to tell a lie. He calls it, "Un fait qui seul m'a plus flatté que tous les complimens qu'a pu m'attirer cet ouvrage." And then thus goes on to relate it:—"Il parut au commencement du carnaval. Un colporteur le porta a Madame la Princesse de Talmont, au jour de bal de l'opéra. Après souper, elle se fit habiller pour y aller, et en attendant l'heure, elle se mit a lire le nouveau roman. A minuit, elle ordonna qu'on mit ses chevaux, et continua de lire. On vint lui dire que ses chevaux étoient mis; elle ne repondit rien. Ses gens, voyant, qu'elle s'oublioit, vinrent l'avertir: qu'il étoit deux heures. Rien ne presse encore, dit-elle en lisant toujours. Quelque temps après, sa montre étant arrêtée, elle sonna pour savoir quelle heure il étoit. On lui dit, qu'il étoit quatre heures. Cela étant, dit-elle, il est trop tard pour aller au Bal, qu'on ôte mes chevaux. Elle se fit deshabiller, et passa le reste de la nuit a lire."

CONFESSIONS, LIV. XI.

The

And when this word is said, you can
also say it—because it is not true.

The five following Sonnets, and Stanzas additional, are only a few of the many attempts which have been made by the Author from time to time, to verify different passages of the **SORROWS OF WERTER**. He had once some intention of throwing into sonnets all the most brilliant passages of the work. Such a series (if tolerably executed) would exhibit a more natural and pathetic picture of the various fluctuations in the mind of a lover than any publication of amorous poetry, even than the effusions of **PETRARCH** himself. The number of sonnets, which could be thus collected, might probably amount to a hundred.

SONNET I.

DAS WAR EINE NACHT, WILHELM, NUN UBERSTEH ICH ALLES, &c

Oh what a night, and ne'er to see her more :
 Could I to thee, my Friend, for refuge fly,
 Each bitter tear into thy bosom pour,
 And breathe upon thy neck each stormy sigh !

Here restless now I sit and gasp for breath,
 And seek my heart's wild tumult to allay,
 And wait like him, whom morning calls to death,
 The morn that calls me from these fields away.

Alas ! She sleeps in peace, nor does she dream,
 That she will never more her WERTER see ;
 Who sternly stems at last wild passion's stream,
 And strongly strives and struggles to get free.

Nor did he once his firm resolve betray,
 But heard each word divine, and tore himself away.

SONNET II.

NIEMALS GEH ICH IM MONDENLICHTE SPAZIEREN, &c.

Ne'er do I walk beneath the lunar ray ;
 But my departed friends to thought arise :
 But death, and all beyond, in clear display,
 Seem still to stand before my pensive eyes.

It must be so—we there shall live anew :
 But WERTER, shall we there each other find ?
 And there with those we love that love renew :
 What says to doubts like these thy active mind ?

“ LOTTA (in haste my trembling tongue reply'd ;
 “ And grasp'd her hand, while tears bedim'd my view),
 “ Nor life nor death can love like ours divide ;
 “ Both here and there shall we that love renew.”

Ah why such words behov'd she then to say,
 When heavy at my heart the parting anguish lay ?

SONNET

STANZAS.

STANZAS.

UND OB DIE LIEBEN ABGESCHIEDENEN VON UNS WISSEN, FUHR

SIE FORT, &c.

Perhaps the dear deceast our fortunes know ;
Perhaps they feel with us, when woes befall,
And see, in happier hours, with what a glow
Of warmer love, we then their love recall.

My mother's form seems still to hover round,
When down I sit at ev'ning's tranquil hour,
And all her babes and mine my chair furround,
As they around her chair were wont to pour.

5

How oft I raise my wishful eye to Heav'n,
That she could look one moment down, to see
How well I keep the sacred promise giv'n
To her in death, their mother still to be.

10

How oft I say—Forgive me, dearest shade ;
I cannot give them what they lost in thee ;
Yet all I can, my care has still essay'd,
Their nurse, their teacher, and their guide to be.

15

Could'st thou, dear faint, our perfect union view,
To God what ardent thanks would then be paid ;
That God, to whom, with grief's last bitter dew,
Thy fault'ring tongue for all thy children pray'd.

20

This LORRA said—but who, like her, can say ?
Or how can lifeless words such heav'nly thoughts convey ?

SONNET

When down I sit at evening's hushful hour,
And all her beads and beads my chain surround,
As they around her chain were wont to pour,
How oft I raise my wishful eye to Heaven,
That she could look one moment down to me,
How well I keep the sacred promise giv'n
To her in death, that mother still to be.
How oft I say—Forgive me, dearest shade,
I cannot give them what they tell in these,
Yet all I can, my ears have still obey'd,
Their name, their teacher, and their guide to be.

Could'st

SONNET III.

O ALBERT SAGTE SIE, ICH WEIS, DU VERGISST NICHT DIE

ABENDE, &c.

Oh ne'er will I forget, at close of day,
 How we, dear ALBERT, with my mother fate;
 When bus'ness oft my father call'd away,
 And sleep had still'd the children's charming prate.

Some pious book then oft employ'd thy hand;
 But seldom did thine eye one page peruse:
 For could not she more useful words command:
 Than many a preacher's tongue has pow'r to use?

Was not each thought of that superior mind,
 That matchless mother, and unequall'd wife,
 For ever active, chearful, good and kind,
 Of more avail than all their rules of life?

God knows how oft to him with tears I pray'd,
 To be, in every point, like that dear mother made!

SONNET

SONNET IV.

WENN SIE SIE GEKANNT HATTEN, SAGTE SIE, INDEM SIE MIR
DIE HAND DRUKTE, &c.

Hadst thou, dear WERTER, but my mother known;
And she was worthy to be known by thee:
Yet was she summon'd to the world unknown,
While her last babe late smiling on her knee.
Tho' ling'ring sickness did her frame destroy,
She to the last was patient and resign'd;
Her children all, but chief her youngest boy,
Alone alarm'd her fond maternal mind.
And such a woman must so soon decay!
And with what ease we suffer from our view,
That custom's pomp should all we love convey;
Which none more keenly feel than children do.
Our darling babes complain'd for many a day,
That those vile men in black their mother bore away.

SONNET

SON-

SONNET V.

WIE ES GEGEN DAS ENDE GIENG, UND SIE ZU MIR
SAGTE, &c.

When near her end my fainted mother drew,
She spoke—and up her children all were brought;
Both those their heavy loss that hardly knew,
And those whom grief had robb'd of sense and thought.

As round the bed they stood, she fervent pray'd,
With lifted hands, and kiss'd them each in turn:

“ Be thou their mother,” then the dear one said;

This hand extended was my sole return.

“ Much hast thou promis'd by that simple sign,

“ A mother's feeling and a mother's eye;

“ Yet that thou know'st how great a charge is thine,

“ From these thy grateful tears I well descry.”

“ This let these babes—and let thy father find

“ In thee a tender wife's obedient faithful mind.”

I can-

I cannot, I think, close this publication in a manner more characteristical and proper, than by the following imitation from the same work.

SONNET VI.

O MEINE FREUNDE! WARUM DER STROM DES GENIES SO
SELTEN AUSBRICHT? &c.—PART I. LETT. VIII.

Ah why so seldom does the stream of Song
Break forth, by Genius swell'd beyond controul;
So seldom pour its mighty waves along,
And overwhelm with rapture's flood th' astonish'd soul?
Why, but for this—that all along the shore
The pedant sons of classic taste reside;
Who tremble when they hear the waters roar,
For all their pretty works on either side.
Left all that swells their feeble hearts with pride,
Their scentless, tiny beds of tulips gay,
Their roots so rare, and summer domes beside,
Should by the torrent rude be swept away;
Whose force they strive incessant to restrain,
By many a critic dam, and many a formal drain.



